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SUBJECT: UPCOMING CHANGES IN FRENCH INTERNATIONAL MEDIA IDENTITY

REF: 07 Paris 3414

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Changes President Sarkozy has set in motion to revitalize the public television industry will likely have a significant impact on France's international media presence. Reforms will consolidate France's internationally broadcast public networks under a new holding company modeled after the BBC. An additional reform associated with the industry makeover would be the elimination of public funding for English- and Arabic-language programming on the international news channel France24, which would mark a new direction for the network and would change its audience considerably. President Sarkozy laid out reform plans in January of this year, though a firm timeline for the consolidation has not yet been set. End Summary.

FRANCE MONDE: CREATION OF A NEW MEDIA CONGLOMERATE

¶2. (U) The structural reforms will bring together France24, TV5 Monde and Radio France International under a holding company to centralize general management and share resources. President Sarkozy announced the plan at a January 8 press conference, during which he referred to the proposed conglomerate as "France Monde." President Sarkozy hopes to rejuvenate public television in France with the reforms and to create an internationally competitive media network. An Elysee transcript of the President's comments at the press conference quotes, "Between Al-Jazeera, which offers an Arab point of view, and CNN, which offers an Anglo-Saxon point of view, we would like to carry a French point of view." The President noted that each of the networks set to join France Monde would maintain a separate identity but would share administrative resources. According to a February 24 article in The New York Times, President Sarkozy has named the current president of France24, Alain de Pouzilhac, to oversee the merger. Reftel discusses the potential economic savings such a consolidation would gain for the French government.

ELIMINATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING

¶3. (SBU) France24 was created in 2006 to launch the French media into the international scene and was modeled after CNN and BBC World. The network began with French and English programming and later introduced programs in Arabic; it is broadcast across Europe, in Africa, in parts of Asia and in several U.S. locations. President Sarkozy's plan to eliminate public funding for English and Arabic programs highlights a new goal for the network: to adopt a distinctly Francophone identity. Former President Jacques Chirac proposed the creation of France24 during his Presidency and supported English-language programming to make the network more

widely accessible; Sarkozy prefers a different approach. At the press conference, he told reporters, "I am not willing to finance a channel that does not speak French." Eliminating foreign-language programming will significantly alter audience patterns for the network.

UNCERTAIN TIMELINE

¶4. (U) The plan for France Monde was originally proposed in late 2007 by Georges-Marc Benamou, the President's advisor on culture and audiovisual media. At that time, financial paper La Tribune reported that the government would establish France Monde over the next three years. In the January press conference, President Sarkozy indicated that the project would begin "as soon as possible, in any case during this year." Specific dates for implementation of the reforms have not yet been announced.

COMMENT: SARKOZY LOOKING TO FRANCE'S IMAGE ABROAD

¶5. (SBU) President Sarkozy's changes to France's international media posture are in line with other reforms he has set in motion to improve efficiency and revitalize the French presence worldwide. The reforms are part of a push for France to take a more active role on the international stage and combat "Anglophone domination" in the media. Though the print press has reported criticism from shareholders in France24 and TV5 Monde as well as from the workers' unions at the affected networks, opposition to the reform does not appear to have threatened its progress. We expect to see further

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evolution of the France Monde conglomeration throughout Sarkozy's presidency.
STAPLETON